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PRIORITY THEMES

DEVELOPMENT: WOMEN IN EXTREME POVERTY INTEGRATION OF WOMEN'S CONCERNS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Commission on the Status of Women, at its thirty-fourth session, selected the issue of "Women in extreme poverty, integration of women's concerns in national development planning" as the priority theme in the area of development for consideration at its thirty-seventh session. In the present report, on the basis of discussions at a seminar organized to prepare the theme, the factors leading to the creation of a relatively higher incidence of poverty among women are examined, as are the relative roles of the State, market and community in combating poverty; recommendations are made for possible action.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Council established, by its resolution 1990/15, the priority themes for each session of the Commission on the Status of Women from 1993 to 1996. The theme for the thirty-seventh session under the heading "Development" is "Women in extreme poverty: integration of women's concerns in national development planning" (see Council resolution 1990/15 annex, sect. III.A). The theme was suggested by the recommendations and conclusions arising from the first review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women for the year 2000, in which it was stated:

> "10. An economic environment of growth with equitable distribution, both at the national level and in the international economic system, is essential, as is the recognition of women's full participation. The feminization of poverty reflects the underlying structural problems faced by women in the midst of economic change. Prevailing economic policies at the national and international levels have frequently failed to take into account potential negative effects on women or women's potential contribution and have accordingly not succeeded.
>
> "Recommendation VII. In order to help revitalize economic growth, international economic and social co-operation together with sound economic policies should be pursued. Structural adjustment and other economic reform measures should be designed and implemented so as to promote the full participation of women in the development process, while avoiding the negative economic and social effects. They should be accompanied by policies giving women equal access to credit, productive inputs, markets and decision-making and this should be incorporated fully into national economic policy and planning." (see Council resolution 1990/15, annex, sect. I.B.)

2. In order to help prepare the theme, a seminar on women in extreme poverty was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Office at Vienna, from 9 to 12 November 1992 at Vienna in order to focus on these issues and make policy recommendations to the Commission. The main conclusions and recommendations of the seminar are attached as an annex to the present report. The analyses in the report draw on those prepared for the seminar. 1/

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The issue of poverty continues to be a major challenge for the international community, Governments and the people themselves. Its eradication is one of the three themes for the World Summit on Social Development to be held in 1995, a major objective of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade (General Assembly resolution 45/99, annex) and a significant component of Agenda 21,* adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

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*The text of Agenda 21 is set out in volumes I-III of the report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992 (A/CONF.151/26). The final version of the

4. There is a growing awareness that poverty in general, and extreme poverty in particular, has a significant gender dimension. This gender dimension helps to explain why and how women and men experience poverty differently and unequally and become impoverished through processes that may differ. If differences between women and men are not taken into account, the causes of poverty cannot be adequately understood or dealt with by public action.

5. Women are in a more disadvantaged position because of their dual need to make a living and to provide care for family members, tasks that are not equitably shared. Demands on time and energy are particular constrictive for women living in poverty, as their labour is the single most important resource at their disposal. The neglect of human reproductive activities by society and especially the lack of a legitimate articulation between production and reproduction constitute the core of gender inequality, which affects women in general and women in poverty specifically. These circumstances are aggravated when, because of external economic factors or the absence of a spouse, the woman becomes the sole income-earner in the household. In addition, the availability of means at the household level to satisfy the needs of all its members is often based on entitlements that are not equitably available to men and women.

6. Both women and men are subject to macro-economic factors relating to income earning and distribution. The gender dimension, at a microeconomic level, affects women and men differently. It also contributes to an intergenerational transmission of poverty.

7. In the past, assistance to poor women vis-à-vis their family roles was primarily in the form of public goods such as health services, education and family planning. These services were often accompanied, however, by the attitude that women were passive dependants of the State, and they often embodied misplaced assumptions about women's real needs. In contrast, social services should be seen as investments in women's capacity to be a productive and equitably remunerated part of the economy and, to come to the core of the issue, they should be aimed at easing the constraints on women's time and the demands on their energy.

8. To change the concept of public programmes implies examining the capacity of the State to deal with poverty and its central role, together with the market and the community in bringing about economic and social change. It also implies a clear understanding of the relationship between the individual and the household when dealing with poverty. Programmes need to take into account the different needs and entitlements of different members of the household and the distribution of resources between them.

9. Governments and the international community should promote change in the formulation, design, planning and implementation of a new poverty agenda, which should include the recognition of women as principal economic actors and enable them to realize their untapped potential. In order to meet the goals of equity and efficiency underlying current development thinking, significant changes are required in the way in which they are approached. These changes should represent a major challenge to society.

10. Governments should promote social innovation that seeks to establish new institutions and new rules of behaviour, inter alia, by bringing hitherto accepted social norms and standards into line with reality. Policies that support a traditional division of labour based on gender should be questioned

in view of their effects on fertility rates, female participation in the labour force and equality of men and women in the labour market.

11. Policies and programmes should be adopted to empower women to become active agents in shaping the ongoing process, including a redefinition of the interrelations between the social, economic and political factors that currently inhibit women's participation and life choices. A new perspective should be applied to the causes of inequality and men should be encouraged to examine the meaning of equality for their own life patterns and identity, including such factors as the emotional rewards to be derived from caring for their children. Society as a whole will benefit from an integrated policy strategy of this kind.

12. Opportunities to enhance both economic efficiency and gender equity should take into account the multiple influences of the structural forces at play and the specific circumstances in each country. There is significant diversity amongst countries, in terms of both the economic integration of women (status of women) and industrial, labour market, social, political and cultural structures.

13. The recommendations made at the seminar should be carefully studied and widely disseminated. They should be taken into account in the discussions on the preparation of the World Summit on Social Development, as well as in the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace. They should also be taken into account by organizations of the United Nations system when they are designing and implementing operational programmes for the eradication of poverty.

II. GENDER AND POVERTY

A. The meaning and measurement of poverty

14. It is important to clarify some of the different meanings given to the concept of poverty. A useful starting point for thinking about poverty is the concept of deprivation: the poor are those who are deprived of basic human needs. Like other important concepts of development, the notion of poverty contains a distinction between means and ends. It cannot be identified exclusively either with deprivation itself or with the lack of means to escape deprivation.

15. The conventional economic approach has been to focus on the "means" aspect of poverty. It has been entirely concerned with the sufficiency of household income in achieving a satisfactory level of welfare; how households choose to use their incomes is seen as a matter of individual choice rather than an issue of poverty. In order to define a "satisfactory" level of welfare, it is necessary to make certain judgements relating to the constituents of both absolute and relative levels of poverty. Absolute levels refer to the deprivation of certain basic needs, which have to be met regardless of the social context. All needs related to human survival - food, water, shelter, fuel - may be seen as making up this minimum bundle of needs. A poverty line based on the level of income necessary to purchase this bundle of goods is an example of an absolute measure of poverty. Relative poverty, on the other hand, is defined by the general standard of living in a given context. It relates to the level of needs considered to constitute an acceptable standard of living in a particular society and is therefore likely to rise with an overall rise in the standard of

living. Thus, an examination of the proportion of households or people in a population within different per capita income deciles provides information on distributional issues missing from "absolute" measures.

16. The distinction between absolute and relative poverty can also be given a particular interpretation in the context of a gender perspective. Policy makers may be interested in the absolute poverty of women, regardless of the situation of men, because of the social and biological synergies between the situation of women and that of dependent family members. Or they may be interested in women's poverty in relation to that of men in a given context, because of their concern with equity and efficiency goals. There are thus sound policy grounds for arguing for better understanding, information and research on women, in both absolute and relative terms.

B. Poverty as a state and a process

17. Poverty is often seen as an essentially static concept, describing the conditions of the poor. At its most stringent, it can be defined as physiologically determined levels of survival, which are generally independent of social and cultural contexts. A more inclusive definition would encompass the satisfaction of culturally defined levels of basic physical needs (physical well-being, housing, clothing, sanitation). A still broader definition results if the state of poverty is stretched to cover social and qualitative factors (for example, powerlessness, dependence, isolation) as well as the more conventional, tangible and physical forms of deprivation.

18. The state of poverty describes the conditions of the poor but offers little by way of explaining it or suggesting future directions for policy. To complement the "basic-needs" formulation of poverty, an analysis of the process of poverty is also necessary, including the causes and mechanisms of its generation and transmission. Here Sen's work on entitlement offers useful argument. In any society, people's claims on the social product are determined by a complex system of entitlements, which are in turn shaped by the social relations and practices that govern possession, distribution and use in that society. 2/ Among different possible entitlement relations, there are those based on trade and exchange, those based on production using own resources, those based on the use of one's labour power in production or sale, those based on inheritance or gift and those based on the State distribution system. 3/ It is important to take into account institutional access, as well as the values of households and the community, in determining the distribution and value of people's claims on the means by which they satisfy their basic needs. The process of poverty can then be described as a deterioration in the value of the two basic parameters - endowments and exchange entitlements that make up the household's or individual's capacity to function at acceptable levels of well-being and achievement.

19. The concept of entitlements can also be extended to intra-household distributional relations, which rest on the beliefs, practices and contracts governing the relations between women and men (including the sexual division of social space and of labour, the seclusion of women, asymmetrical access to inherited property, marital and familial arrangements) and the terms of their access to independent endowments and exchange entitlements. 4/ The fact that women do not have as ready access as men do to bureaucracy and the market as a means of meeting their basic needs means that they are far more reliant on the moral economy of the household and community than are their male counterparts among the poor. This has direct implications for the formulation of programmes to deal with female poverty.

C. Gender and entitlement systems

20. Household entitlement systems consist of "implicit" contracts between household members governing the distribution of food and work, and of the specific responsibilities entailed in making a living and providing care for family members. An individual's entitlement bundle therefore specifies his or her claims and obligations, resources and responsibilities in relation to other household members.

21. While there are many cross-cultural variations in these household-based entitlement systems, a common feature is that women are given primary responsibility for the tasks associated with providing care for family members: providing health services, preparing food, providing fuel and water and bearing and raising children. Cross-cultural variations are to be found in the ways in which women's responsibility for care of family members is translated into obligations connected with earning a living.

22. Asymmetries in household entitlements reinforce those existing in broader systems of state and market-based entitlements. The word "entitlements" is used here in the "extended" sense, referring not only to the ownership and contractual exchange of resources in the market but to the normative entitlements that determine distribution within households and communities.

23. They are concerned with command over labour, opportunities for the productive use of labour, returns on labour and control over these returns. As a general rule, women are less able than men to command the labour power necessary to activate or sustain independent forms of production. They have fewer options in the labour market because their prior responsibilities within the home make them less mobile and investments in the labour market tend to be lower. Returns on their labour are also lower - partly because of direct discrimination, partly because they have fewer marketable skills and partly because of imperfections in market forces, which confine them to less well paid and more casual segments of the labour market. Finally, women are more likely to be found in forms of labour processes where either their contribution is subsumed within an overall process that is controlled by men or else marketing of their produce and hence control over it passes to men.

24. The norms and practices governing the division of labour in different household production and entitlement systems determine the extent to which women are able to have command over their own labour. Where women's familial responsibilities include food provisioning, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa, they are more likely to have some control over how they use their own labour. Even in West Africa, however, which is the region with the highest incidence of women's own-account farming, there are gender asymmetries in command over labour power. This asymmetry occurs because husbands and senior males have non-reciprocal rights over the labour of wives and female members. The extent to which women owe such labour to their husbands restricts the amount of time they have left for their own enterprises. Access to hired labour is restricted by women's lack of cash and of the social power to sustain long term contracts. There are possibilities for reciprocal labour arrangements between women but these involve a redistribution of women's own labour over a period of time rather than an enhancement of their labour entitlements. Therefore, even in areas where women's own-account enterprises are recognized, they operate under greater labour constraints than do the men in their households.

25. In other parts of Africa and in much of Asia, women's labour contributions to household production are subsumed under male-controlled processes. Particularly in areas of strict female seclusion in South Asia, women are restricted in their labour options and generally work either as unpaid family labour or in home-based forms of income-earning. Where women work as unpaid family labour, they generally relinquish control over their labour contributions to the male heads of household, who initiate production, decide its scale and are usually responsible for disposal of the proceeds.

26. Thus, labour-based entitlement systems are unfair to women in a number of different ways. For example, women are at a disadvantage as a result of non-reciprocal labour arrangements with male household members, subsumption in male-controlled production processes, norms that restrict their access to paid labour, and a smaller cash income and hence the inability to hire labour.

27. Negative synergy associated with female poverty lies in the combination of their dual responsibilities in family formation and family livelihood strategies. Having to earn a living and care for other family members simultaneously explains why time allocation studies from much of the world show that women generally work longer hours than men when their unpaid domestic labour is taken into account.

28. The official statistics on female participation in the labour force, however, only capture some dimensions of women's work and not the full range of tasks that they perform. The statistics usually indicate how much of this work is in economic activity as conventionally defined. Regional variations in the gender division of labour show up in the extent to which women are recorded as being economically active in national statistics. As shown in studies done for the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 5/ there has been a systematic tendency in population census figures to underestimate levels of female participation in the labour force because much of women's work in rural areas is counted as unpaid family labour, owing to its seasonal and intermittent nature. A comparison of estimates based on ILO standardized definitions and estimates from existing farm censuses shows an average of 22 per cent by ILO standards and 36 per cent in agricultural censuses. Contrasts are sharpest in North Africa and Western Asia (4 and 27) and least for sub-Saharan Africa (39 and 47).

29. Girls and women are generally at a disadvantage in acquiring formal education and specialized skills that might improve their productivity in both household-based and market-based production. Access to education and training still remains a major problem in many developing countries, especially in relation to women who still constitute a large proportion of the illiterate population. In 1960, worldwide, there were 14 illiterate women for every 10 illiterate men; in 1985 the ratio was 17:10. For developing countries the ratios in 1960 and 1985 were 13:10 and 17:10, respectively; nearly all the female illiterates are concentrated in the developing countries. 6/

30. For developing countries, training in agriculture, forestry and fishing is particularly important because these are critical economic sectors, in which women are important members of the labour force. In 1970, the average ratio of women to men doing advanced studies in these fields was 1:10 in all developing regions. By 1984, the situation had improved in Latin America and the Caribbean, reaching 1:2, but in Africa, Asia and the Pacific the ratio was still 1:5. Women represent on average only 26 per cent of those enrolled in

training for law and business in Africa, and 38 per cent in Asia and the Pacific. In all regions except Africa (where the situation is worse), women represent only 30 per cent of the people trained in science and engineering. 7/

31. Throughout the world, gender differentials in returns on labour are considerable. The Human Development Report, 1991 8/ showed that in the industrialized economies covered by the Report, the differentials ranged between one third and two thirds, while in the poorer countries the disparities were large, varying from a quarter to a half. To a certain extent this reflects differences in human capital: men have more education and are in better-paid technical fields. Women's disadvantages within the labour market - poorer health and education, child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities, and a lower capacity to raise their wages through enhanced human capital - make it more difficult for them to move from one job or area to another.

32. Along with women's disadvantaged entitlements within the household and labour markets, there is some evidence to suggest they have also been discriminated against in their entitlements to officially distributed resources. The assumption of male headship of unified household units has led to the distribution of irrigated land, agricultural extension advice and credit to male heads, with a disregard for the interests of women within households or of households headed by females.

D. Poverty and households headed by females

33. A strong interlinkage between gender and poverty is found in the situation of households headed by females. Female headship emerged as an early indicator of women's poverty because it was the only one that was visible in household-based approaches to poverty. An early review 9/ estimated that in the developing world between 10 per cent and 30-40 per cent of all households fell into this category.

34. Households recorded as having a female head encompass quite disparate household economies and family structures. There is a distinction between female-headed, where women are the key decision-makers and economic managers, female-managed, where women manage household economies on behalf of an absent male head, and female-maintained, where women are the main economic contributors. A major study of female headship has shown that households maintained primarily by women are likely to be among the poorest in most societies. 10/

E. Gender and the intergenerational transmission of poverty

35. A final interaction between gender and poverty is the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Here, women's role as mothers and their ability to manage resources within poor households are likely to have important consequences for the ability of their children to escape from poverty in the future. The first aspect of this interaction lies in the determinants of the children's nutritional status. Malnutrition has particularly severe consequences in the first years of life. It affects the individual's morbidity and mortality rates as well as rates of physical and mental development. Deaths of children under five years of age are disproportionately high in developing countries, and are mostly connected with malnutrition.

36. Where gender discrimination goes so far as to deprive women of education, there is likely to be an intergenerational transmission of poverty through other routes. It is likely that, within such households, educational

opportunities will continue to be denied to girl children, so that the cycle of deprivation continues.

III. THE ROLE OF THE STATE, MARKET AND COMMUNITY

37. Poverty requires a public response. That response can be made by different actors using different means. The question which public responses are most effective stands at the centre of the issue of incorporating gender into national planning.

38. The role of the State is of particular concern. In the Third United Nations Development Decade, which was characterized by a widespread imposition of structural adjustment programmes, the inclination was to remove State interference in order to allow the market mechanism to operate through the impersonal forces of supply and demand. When the capacity of the State to influence the distribution of goods and services was reduced, however, negative effects on the lives of many people in developing countries were observed. For example, in the 1980s, social spending was reduced proportionately with total public spending, but real government spending per person declined in about two thirds of the countries of Africa and Latin America. 11/ Much of the reduction affected subsidies that were received implicitly through State-financed education, health care and housing, and their reduction affected the poor more, as it constituted a higher proportion of their income than it did of the income of those who were better off. 12/

39. The functions of the State are to raise taxes, allocate and reorganize resources and redefine priorities. The State may exercise power to improve the welfare of citizens equally through the proper organization of national development planning. Selectivity in public expenditure may involve both intersectoral and intrasectoral allocations. Defence expenditure, for example, might be reduced and social sector expenditure increased. Much of the expenditures on the social sector and on food subsidies is considered not to have priority. Many countries are spending from two to three times more for military purposes than on education and health. A reallocation of resources offers considerable potential for improving growth and the human dimension within any macro-constraints. In practice, there would be bureaucratic and political obstacles to rationalizing priorities along these lines. These may limit improvements in the allocation of resources but are unlikely to prevent them entirely.

40. A major problem with market forces is risk. The expansion of market relations adds new economic opportunities and new ways of achieving prosperity through specialization and exchange; but it also introduces new sources of vulnerability, because there is no guarantee that the pattern of opportunities and prices will cover subsistence needs. 13/ Those with nothing to sell but their capability for work, their labour power, are particularly vulnerable.

41. Moreover, markets themselves are arenas of "cooperative conflicts", in which conflict and congruence of interests co-exist. Thus, while it is in the interest of the buyers and sellers of labour power to cooperate with each other in production, in the distribution of the benefits of production there is a potential for conflict.

42. Women do not enjoy the same relation to their own labour as men do. For women, the ability to work is not socially constituted as something that they

unconditionally own and of which they can freely dispose. First, the sexual division of labour decrees certain types of work to be the social obligation of women. The bulk of this work involves caring for others - children, the sick, the old, and adult able-bodied men, too - and such work has a prior claim on women's time. Secondly, women's relation to their own labour is conditioned by their relation to men. The structure of gender relations gives men the social power to set limits on the type of work that women may undertake. Moreover, they may not even be able to control fully the fruits of their labours, which may be appropriated by their menfolk. So women are in a more disadvantaged position in the market.

43. In addition, trying to avoid the market, relying more on culture, where social exchange operates on the basis of reciprocity redistribution, women are less capable of being integrated into the market and receiving recognition for their productive activity within the context of current social values, or proper remuneration for it.

44. The kind of market opportunities that poor women should have a right to are those that recognize them as persons with rights, capabilities and responsibilities. Even in the absence of overt discrimination, market opportunities that tend to reduce poor women to units of human capital, do not recognize their domestic responsibilities and fail to offset the weak bargaining position of poor women in "cooperative conflicts" are inadequate opportunities, which may even be exploitative. In deregulated markets, women's position is particularly disadvantaged. 14/ The amount that they can earn as isolated individuals, unprotected by collective organization or the right to be treated as human beings rather than factors of production, is in most cases too low for them to be fully self-supporting as female heads of household, free of male control but also of male economic support.

45. There are alternatives. It would be possible to provide more satisfactory market opportunities if markets were socially regulated as mechanisms rather than having controls imposed on them. This could involve a combination of actions by government agencies, for example, to introduce and uphold health and safety regulations; to provide such services as sanitation, electricity and child care; to teach poor women workers about their rights and enable them to uphold such rights and bargain for higher incomes; and to provide alternative sources of employment and credit. In addition, State intervention to provide alternative employment opportunities in the public sector can enhance the bargaining power of labour in the private sector.

46. Access to resources (capital and credit, land and technology) seems to be a sensitive measure of absolute poverty. Women still have restricted access to land and other factors of agricultural production, such as technology, credit and subsidy. The State could not only increase women's access to land, credit and services but could also take additional measures to augment the productivity of the resource base. This implies the improvement of land quality, energy use, water availability, development of alternative social support structures and strengthening of the transport and construction capacity. At present, the resources that are available for development are either poorly used or not used at all.

47. There are several links between gender and State. The most complex, although the most critical for women, is the collectivity of norms, laws, ideologies and patterns of action that shape the meaning of politics and the

nature of political discourse. It is at this level that gender ideologies operate in their most powerful form. 15/ These range from birth control in one country to efforts to increase the number of women in paid employment in another. The State intervenes in the sexual division of labour by promoting, or not promoting, an equal opportunity policy. The State has a constitutive role in forming and reforming social patterns. For example, the ideological support of the distinction between the private and public spheres as a reflection of natural biological differences, and consequently a physical inevitability rather than a social construction, will have grave consequences for women, excluding them from all public activities on an equal basis with men.

48. Coherent and consistent policy depends on effective cooperation between different levels of policy-making bodies. This raises the question of balance between centralized and decentralized decision-making. The move towards democracy, the drive for flexibility and responsiveness to various needs of different groups of population increase the pressure for decentralized decision-making and emphasize the role of local governments and community organizations. But ensuring that policy objectives, such as the achievement of gender equality, are being met is more difficult when the main social and economic decisions are decentralized. The proper balance between different actors is an important challenge. Whichever way democracy develops in the future, however, central regulation should retain its role in the setting of minimum standards and conditions for a fair social environment, including rules against discrimination.

49. The contribution of community, non-governmental organizations and other citizen's organizations should be seen as an opportunity to extend women's entitlements, to give them the possibility of earning an independent income, and to develop their skills for advocating and defending their rights. In particular, emphasis could be placed by collaborative community institutions on developing women's leadership skills and ability to voice their demands in public arenas.

50. Initiatives from that level can provide a more democratic and effective system of shaping the form of interaction of markets, State and community organizations than either commercial pressures or technocratic planners. They should not replace the State or private landlords, employers, merchants and banks, but should inform, exert pressure, mobilize, criticize and campaign, so that both public and private sector agents are given incentives to respond in ways that extend the entitlements of women. They are, above all, catalysts, with the potential to trigger reactions much more powerful than their own size and resources would suggest and to generate a process of genuinely democratic policy.

51. It is vital that such citizens' initiatives on behalf of poor women should be accorded a legitimate place in a plurality of democratic and participatory practices. In the policy process, they play the same role as prices in the market process, giving incentives for a changed resource allocation.

52. From the entitlements perspective, poverty is in the final analysis due to a lack of rights. The fundamental thrust of anti-poverty policy must be to expand the entitlements of the poor through an extension of their rights, so that the rights of social security can be made to stand as guarantees of minimal protection and survival. 16/ Here, social security is understood in

the broad sense of socially provided security from deprivation and vulnerability; the means of social provision will involve complex interactions of markets, State and community.

53. The kind of State provision that poor women should have ought to support them as people in their own right, not merely as dependants of men, and treat them as citizens, not merely as "targets". Provision by the State of "safety nets" targeted to poor people who are unable to benefit from the growth process ends in reproducing the social dependency of women, rather than challenging it. In too many schemes, poor women are cast in the role of recipients of welfare hand-outs rather than claimers of rights; and there is no system of accountability. Indeed, the whole idea of casting the poor in the role of "targets" does not lend itself to enabling the poor to be active citizens and to calling public officials to account. The effective organization of State provision for poor women should be judged not simply in terms of financial criteria but in terms of its accountability to poor women. This means setting up organizational systems through which poor women are not simply "consulted" by State agencies but can appraise the performance of State officials and have some effect on their promotion and remuneration and the contraction or expansion of the units in which they serve. All citizens, and not only the poor, benefit from the greater accountability of public officials. Greater accountability is an essential feature in the move from dependence on State provision to holding rights over State provision.

54. The key to extending the entitlements of the poor lies in public action, which means much more than action by the State:

> "Public action includes not just what is done <u>for</u> the public by the state, but also what is done <u>by</u> the public for itself. The latter includes not merely the directly beneficial contributions of social institutions, but also the actions of pressure groups and political activists." 17/

55. The public, in this view, is not to be seen merely as "the patient" whose well-being commands attention, but also as "the agent" whose actions can transform society.

56. In that respect, the empowerment of women acquires a critical meaning. Decisions that determine the shape of socio-economic policies lack an input from women. These decisions are made mainly by men, so they tend to reflect the values, perspectives and life experience of only half of the population. Greater participation by women in decision-making would mean that everybody could have a voice in social demands with regard to the allocation and use of resources, whether they be fiscal revenues, economic or cultural or access to power. It would make the decision-making process more transparent and accessible, and thus more democratic.

57. The role of the State in the process of development is now undergoing a process of rethinking. There is a strong belief that it is necessary to bring the State back into the analysis of social, political and economic reality. In this new stage of development women have a serious problem in defining the appropriate response to the State and pursuing their goals for development, which are not distinct from the goals of human development in general. Women's responses can be classified either as seeking disengagement from the State or as seeking engagement with the State. 18/

58. Several strategies can be identified for disengagement, escape and reactive collective action, such as what has been termed "suffer-manage". Suffer-manage refers to situations where State policies are incapable of alleviating hardships experienced by people. This is the situation we are witnessing in developing countries. 18/ Women are bearing the main family responsibilities, walking on a tightrope in order to meet family consumption needs. They are exhausted by this everyday struggle for survival and become discontented with the Government. Meeting a hostile social environment, women are looking for insulation within the family or kin networks, which are explicitly not incorporated into the State. They consider the family to be a safer and closer domain, which affords them some kind of protection against State intrusion and an opportunity to gain power, recognition and resources, even though of a more limited nature, within a familiar context.

59. This kind of response certainly implies some kind of protection from State policies, but the implications for women are rather problematic, for two reasons. First, societies are characterized by gender inequality and the modern State continues to support this to a certain extent. Thus, seeking refuge in non-State structures, women encounter male domination and their subordinate position is not eliminated. Autonomy from the State is an illusion and it is not social autonomy for women. The family is linked to the State by so many ties that the women might not be left alone. The extended family has historically been the most important institution to help the poor cope to some extent with poverty. The traditional kinship ties, however, are undergoing changes everywhere. To the extent that nuclear family ties have been eroded, women have suffered more than men as asset-control structures and male-enforced customs have remained almost the same.

60. Under some circumstances, women seek disengagement from the State through collective action, opposing certain government decisions, such as an increase in prices and a reduction of subsidies. The outcome here might be repression by the State. Moreover, non-participation in such activities does not guarantee safety for women. Often, State repression of women has resulted from particular policy priorities or State definitions of policies, such as prohibiting abortions etc. It might be more reasonable for women not to withdraw from the State but to seek to enter the State and transform it to meet their needs.

61. Women should not be victims of the ongoing processes and bear the bulk of the costs through the feminization of poverty. On the contrary, it is important to ensure that women fully participate in and benefit from new opportunities. How women are to be integrated into the ongoing process so that they themselves are the subjects of development and can benefit from the processes is the most important question here. There is no single solution to this. But as it is clear that women's interests are not automatically recognized at the level of political and economic decision-making, women themselves should be able to open the channels that will give them a voice in the process of expressing demands and taking decisions. In that respect, every effort should be made to facilitate the women's movement and to strengthen national machinery or establish it if it does not already exist. The role of national machinery is extremely important in mobilizing relevant information and making it available to both policy makers and women themselves. But it should not mean that the existence of a national machinery should absolve other decision-making bodies from the responsibility for dealing with women's needs and concerns.

62. The reinforcement of many consensus-building and mediation mechanisms, including political parties, trade unions, employers' associations,

non-governmental organizations, local authorities etc., should develop in such a way as to help transform potential conflict situations into negotiation processes, characterized by the acceptance of common rules of the game, a shared view of the major strategic lines of development and respect for the demands of different social groups, including women. Women themselves have every potential to be economic and political actors and the ability to represent their own interests.

Notes

1/ Especially, N. Kabeer, "Women in poverty: a review of concepts and findings"; D. Elson, "Public action, poverty and development: a gender aware analysis"; "Poverty, gender and the role of the State", paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

2/ A. Sen, Poverty and Famines, an Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation (London, Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 1-2.

3/ Ibid., p. 2.

4/ A. Sen, Hunger and Entitlements (Wider, Helsinki, 1987); and J. Dreze and A. Sen, Hunger and Public Action (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989).

5/ See R. Dixon-Mueller, "Women in agriculture: counting the labour force in developing countries" in Population and Development Review, September 1982; R. Dixon-Mueller and Richard Anker, "Assessing women's economic contributions to development" (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1988).

6/ Data Highlights, No. 6, May 1989.

7/ The World's Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.90.XVII.3).

8/ United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 1991 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991).

9/ M. Buvinic, N. Youseff and V. von Elm, Women-headed Households: the Ignored Factor in Development Planning (Washington, D.C., International Centre for Research on Women, 1978), p. 86.

10/ Notes from Seminar I, II and III. The Determinants and Consequences of Female-Headed Households, held on 12 and 13 December 1988, 27 and 28 February 1989 and in April 1989 sponspored jointly by the Population Council and the International Centre for Research on Women.

11/ United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 1990 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 85.

12/ 1989 Report on the World Social Situation (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.IV.1).

13/ Dreze and Sen, op. cit., p. 5.

14/ See G. Standling, "Global feminization through flexible labour", World Development, vol. 17, No. 7 (1989).

15/ Women, the State, and Development, Sue Ellen M. Charlton, Jana Everett and Kathleen Staudt, eds. (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 12-13.

16/ Dreze and Sen, op. cit., p. 20.

17/ Ibid., p. 61.

18/ Victor Azarya and Naomi Chazan, "Disengagement from the State in Africa: reflections on the experience of Ghana and Guinea", Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 29, No. 1 (January 1987), pp. 106-131.

Annex

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SEMINAR ON WOMEN IN EXTREME POVERTY, INTEGRATION OF WOMEN'S CONCERNS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

(Vienna, 9-12 November 1992)

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I. CHARACTERIZATION OF WOMEN IN POVERTY

1. The issue of poverty needs to be given top priority by all, from community-based organizations, local and subnational governments and national Governments, international agencies and intergovernmental bodies to non-governmental organizations, special interest groups and bilateral and multilateral agencies. In particular, specific consideration should be given to poor women whose voices have had the least impact on policy makers.

2. Women in poverty are capable actors, who have managed with extremely scarce resources to ensure the basic survival and well-being of their families. They make a critical contribution to social welfare and economic production. They perform a variety of roles in the arenas of production and reproduction. In addition to earning livelihoods for their families, they bear and nurture children, they care for the health of the family and they are frequently the key food producers. Their role as managers of natural resources make them central to community-based sustainable development. Despite their constrained circumstances, women in poverty make a wide-ranging set of contributions. Investing in their capabilities is likely to be a cost-effective use of scarce social resources, given the multiplier effects it will have across the family and the community. It is in societies' own interests to invest in the human resources of the poor, and of women in poverty in particular.

A. Early approaches

3. In the past, approaches to poverty tended to be narrowly focused on household income measures. The emphasis on income was justified as focusing on the means by which the basic needs of the household could be met. Individual

actors within the household were not visible within this formulation and their contributions to the household economy tended to be subsumed under the contributions of a policy-designated "household head". The focus on the household also obscured the extent to which individual needs within the household were met, while the focus on income led to a neglect of non-monetized components of household survival strategies. A further limitation of this approach was that it led to an analysis of poverty that was detached from the broader contextual forces.

4. A number of implications for the formulation of strategies to deal with poverty flowed from this earlier approach. Its concern was with the monetized economy, whereas the poor, particularly women in poverty, tend to operate between the monetized and non-monetized sectors. Resources distributed through various development agencies therefore tended to target male household members, who were more likely to specialize in monetized labour. Where strategies for alleviating poverty did take poor women into account, it treated them as passive victims of their circumstances rather than as social actors, managing with extremely constrained resources. As a result, such strategies either adopted a "hand-out" approach to poverty or else sought to promote financially unviable and piecemeal income-generating projects.

5. Moreover, the problems of poverty and its solutions were seen primarily in terms of individual households. The extent to which the processes of poverty are the result of the actions of agencies beyond the household were ignored. The fact that development strategies aimed at economic growth frequently exacerbated the situation of the poor was not taken into account. Strategies to deal with poverty were added on as an afterthought rather than being integrated into development strategies at their very inception.

B. Structure of entitlements: an alternative approach to women in poverty

6. It has become increasingly recognized that gender-blind development has been harmful to the interests of the poor, among whom women are disproportionately represented. A new approach to poverty is necessary, which recognizes the way in which gender relations in different contexts help to structure the specific experiences of men, women and children living in poverty and determine their consequences. Such an approach must make the interests of the poor, and of women in poverty in particular, central to equitable development and international peace. Policies that take into account a gender-sensitive analysis can simultaneously alleviate extreme poverty and provide greater potential for future human and economic development. It is furthermore a coherent policy approach, which produces a cost-effective and efficient use of scarce resources.

7. Poverty can be analysed at the international, the national and the household levels. The policies made by agencies at the international and regional levels frequently impinge on the lives of the poor. International trade agreements, policies relating to good governance, humanitarian and relief efforts and the management of balance of payments: all these have implications for the social and economic conditions under which women in poverty cope with the exigencies of their daily lives.

8. At the national level, the unequal distribution of resources creates different categories of deprived people. Underdevelopment or reduction in levels of development reduces the public provision of social services, thereby

shifting the burden of provision either to the market sector or, in the case of the poor, to the unpaid domestic sector.

9. The final level of analysis is the household, which may be envisaged as a site of "cooperative conflict". This means that household members cooperate in order to earn their livelihoods and meet their basic needs. Unequal divisions in resources and responsibilities between women and men within the household, however, can create conflict in intra-household distribution and gender differentials in the experience of poverty. Women's poverty is shaped by the interaction between gender, class, ethnicity and religion and even by the division between South and North. These forms of inequality take very different forms in different parts of the world; poverty has to be understood in culturally specific contexts.

10. Poverty can best be described as deprivation in terms of basic survival needs and the broad package of entitlements, opportunities and responsibilities by which people meet their needs. By "entitlements", we are referring to command over resources and opportunities, based on the endowments that people have and the exchanges that they are able to engage in. The notion of entitlements, however, goes beyond narrow economic ones to encompass legal, customary and normative entitlements.

11. Women experience poverty differently from men, owing to gender inequalities in entitlements and responsibilities. They have fewer economic resources, less access to labour markets and fewer legal and customary rights, including rights to common property resources. Another dimension relates to information, a critical precondition for exercising the opportunity to make choices. Against that, women shoulder a greater burden of responsibilities within the household than do men. Women in poverty contribute a significant proportion of the household income but have to combine this with their reproductive responsibilities and with maintaining the health and welfare of the family. Women in poverty experience more restrictions than men in their mobility, owing to prevailing norms and customs. The net result of these interlocking disadvantages is that they are disenfranchised from decision-making structures, beginning with those of the household and extending to the wider public sphere.

C. Practical implications

12. Poverty, therefore, has more severe consequences for women than for men. Women's workload increases more than that of men with increasing poverty. Women expand their responsibilities in order to provide the welfare services that wealthier households are able to purchase or that the State could provide. The double burden that women carry forces them to transfer part of it to other women, such as young girls and elderly women, in order to cope. This has serious consequences for the education of the next generation of women and, therefore, implications for the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

13. In order to have a better understanding of female poverty, caution should be exercised about assuming that household headship automatically implies the primary breadwinning role. Although households headed by women have been identified as disproportionately represented among the poor, it should not be assumed that women in households headed by males do not contribute to household livelihood strategies. In fact, among the poor, women contribute a significant proportion of the household income, whether the household be headed by a male or by a female. Female headship may therefore be too blunt a category to

capture women and children's poverty in all contexts. The critical issue is whose income is maintaining the household. Where a man is absent but providing remittances, a household apparently headed by a female may not be poor. Women-maintained households with dependants have been found to be poor in most circumstances.

14. The intergenerational transmission of poverty to children, especially girls, can be perceived from the above context. One mechanism of transmission is that malnourished mothers produce low-weight babies; early nutritional disadvantage is especially difficult to recover from. As already noted, poor women often have to rely on children, especially girls, to do the housework if they are working in the market. This undermines the children's ability to acquire the skills and education that will enable them to escape from poverty in the future. Poor women with little education are less likely to invest in marketable qualifications for their children, especially where this conflicts with investments in basic survival needs. In poorer households, the education of girls is more likely than that of boys to be traded off against survival needs.

15. Against these negative implications, however, there is evidence to show that in many parts of the world, where women control income or enjoy a reasonable degree of status and autonomy within the household, children are better nourished.

16. Among women in extreme poverty, there are categories of women, such as the elderly, women with disabilities, displaced or refugee women, whose special circumstances require a special set of interventions.

D. Methodological issues

17. The fact that women and men experience poverty in different ways means simply that women have less time and less power than men. Time is directly related to labour, the most important resource at the disposal of the poor: investment in labour, returns per unit of labour time, amount of time spent in different forms of work, health care, leisure and sleep. Power is directly related to control over the proceeds of one's own labour and the ability to control the labour of others. In the broader sense, power relates to the ability to exercise control over significant aspects of one's own life.

18. The entitlement approach has the advantage of yielding a range of key indicators of poverty, encompassing the central aspects of time and power. It yields not only quantitative measures, which have been found to be narrow and incapable of capturing contextual differences, but also qualitative measures, which capture psychological factors and power structures in the creation of poverty. In particular it encourages the measurement of gender differences in the ability to participate in development processes as an important consequence of gender differences in time and power among poor households.

19. The household should be the main unit of analysis for the study of poverty. Inequalities in entitlements between household members will not, however, be visible in household-based indicators. They will, therefore, have to be supplemented by intra-household information. Furthermore, there is a distinction between households and families and the way these are constituted in different societies. Once again, a context-specific analysis is needed.

20. One way of helping to integrate poor women into the policies that affect their lives is to build on their own perceptions of their poverty, problems and needs and their expertise. Information thus has to be a two-way process: (a) information provided by women on their lives; and (b) information provided by development practitioners to expand women's opportunities to make choices in what affects their lives and the lives of their families and communities.

21. The invisibility of poor women in statistical data has often led to their neglect in past programmes. In order to overcome this problem, it is necessary for women's unpaid subsistence and domestic labour and overall economic contribution to society to be given recognition in national income accounts. Visibility is not enough, however. Strategies for dealing with poverty are unlikely to be effective or sustainable if they are not fully integrated into strategies for development and if they do not draw on the participation of the intended beneficiaries from their very inception. Participation in development is a right, as stated in the United Nations Charter, and a number of international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Assembly resolution 34/180). Such participation is, therefore, critical on grounds of both efficiency and equity.

E. Recommendations

22. Governments, intergovernmental bodies, international agencies, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations should examine the causes of the increasing global numbers of people living in poverty and the poverty implications of current macro-policies, since these have direct implications for the lives of the poor, whether men or women. A similar effort should be directed to assessing the impact of development programmes on women's poverty.

23. Humanitarian assistance and development programmes should recognize and respond to the fact that the experience of poverty and the consequences of poverty are different for women and men. Attempts to alleviate poverty should be responsive to these gender differences. Development professionals, at all levels, should be trained to assess and respond to gender differences in poverty analysis.

24. Policy formulation affecting women in poverty should be responsive to the needs identified by and within communities and be coordinated at the community, regional and national levels.

25. Governments, donors, intergovernmental organizations and international agencies should facilitate the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of projects and programmes that alleviate poverty among women by community-based and non-governmental organizations. Expanding the educational and training opportunities of women and girls in poverty is a cost-effective measure to alleviate and contain the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Training programmes for the poorest women in functional literacy and the acquisition of skills are especially important. The same can be said about providing quality employment and income-earning opportunities for women in poverty, as well as increasing women's access to health and the realization of their basic right to choose the number and spacing of their children. As a corollary to these recommendations, Governments and donors dealing with emergency and humanitarian assistance should provide incentives to poor parents to educate girls.

26. Nutritional assistance should be provided to adolescent, pregnant, breast-feeding and post-partum women and their infants and children.

27. Governments, donors, intergovernmental organizations, international agencies and non-governmental organizations should investigate the determinants of women's poverty and devise and refine qualitative indicators to assess the magnitude, and severity, of poverty among women. They should also characterize the situation of women in extreme poverty and assess the number of women in this condition.

28. Since the two main obstacles to the improvement of the condition of women in poverty are their powerlessness and the heavy demands on their time, development interventions should alleviate the time burden of women in poverty and increase the economic returns on the time they spend working. These interventions should give women in poverty social, legal and economic powers.

29. Development interventions should target women in poverty while recognizing and responding to the varying compositions, structures and dynamics of households. Interventions should strive to distribute benefits equitably within households and communities. Beyond households, development interventions should increase the access of women in poverty, as individuals and as women's groups, to productive resources and labour markets.

30. National and international data collection systems should: (a) include women's informal work on measures of gross domestic product; (b) document reliably women's time-use returns on labour and poverty differentials by age; (c) include gender-specific indicators in household income and expenditure surveys; and (d) add household variables, disaggregated by gender, to employment and labour market surveys.

31. Perhaps most importantly, as already recommended by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-sixth session, a/ the implementation of many of these recommendations will necessitate fundamental gender-oriented revisions of the development agendas of Governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations.

32. Governments, intergovernmental bodies, international agencies and non-governmental organizations should deploy or reallocate financial resources to ensure implementation of these recommendations.

II. RESPONSES TO WOMEN IN EXTREME POVERTY

A. Basic responses

33. It is considered that measures to alleviate poverty should be directed at the situation of all people living in extreme poverty. But, recognizing that poverty is experienced differently by women and men, it is recommended that action should be based on an analysis that systematically takes into account gender relations and the way that women are disempowered within them.

34. The overall aim of measures to alleviate poverty should be to guarantee the entitlements of the poor. In the case of women in poverty, this means strengthening their ability to exercise command over resources in their own right as full citizens of their societies. Measures to alleviate poverty must not treat women as dependants nor use them as instruments for family survival,

but must seek to empower them and to guarantee their human rights. The provision of social support systems in health, family planning, education and caring is a precondition for empowering poor women.

35. It is important to consider the ways in which the market, States and public action could contribute to the alleviation of poverty. Policy on poverty may have begun as a State-led effort, but in many countries it is giving way to a market-led policy, though the extent of marketization and privatization has varied. It is recognized that the historical experiences of countries differ with regard to the type of State and the form of transition to a greater degree of market orientation that it adopts. Policy needs to be sensitive to a variety of historical experience.

36. Response to poverty has to consider all kinds of heterogeneity, for example, types of market, State-agency and community organization, as well as the different sizes of the private and public sectors. The best way to take these differences into account is to ensure that policy dealing with poverty is responsive to the expressed wants of different groups of women in extreme poverty. As this requires that women in poverty should be able to identify, develop and express their views through their access to decision-making, policy makers should also create an environment that is accountable to women in poverty.

37. Markets, States and civil and community organizations all have an important role to play in improving the situation of women in extreme poverty.

38. The interaction between women in extreme poverty and market forces, both in formal and informal markets, is complex. On the one hand, access to markets could offer new income-earning opportunities. On the other hand, market forces could create new inequalities and deprive women in poverty of access to common property; and the privatization of health, education and social insurance could deprive women in poverty of access to affordable resources for human development.

39. Women in extreme poverty have great difficulty in gaining access to markets, owing to their lack of training, credit, land, information and opportunities. Zoning laws and police harassment may also act as barriers to access.

40. In order to determine the benefits of market opportunities to women in poverty, it is necessary to consider the legal and institutional framework of markets, and the extent to which these women have the right to organize within them.

41. A wide range of civil and community organizations and non-governmental organizations are helping to increase the command that women in poverty have over resources, and the control they exercise over their lives. Among the key achievements of these organizations are the facilitation of poor women's access to credit, skills, technology and land. Public action plays a role in this process.

42. Women in poverty, including disabled women, women refugees and displaced and elderly women, have been largely excluded from the democratic process and it is essential that it be opened up to them. If State agencies become more accountable to the least powerful groups in society, they will become more accountable to all members of society.

43. Two areas of particular concern are identified. First, it is recognized that, as a consequence of economic recession and political upheavals in many countries of the world, the mass migration of people is no longer temporary or incidental. But adequate policies have not yet been developed to deal with displaced persons, migrants and refugees. High priority must be assigned to the implementation of policies to tackle the needs of these people, particularly women in poverty with young children.

44. New technology can improve or worsen the situation of women in poverty. Its potentially negative effects should be assessed within the context of the linkages between women, environment and economic growth. The role of women as natural resource managers should be recognized in the design of environmental projects.

45. The design and formulation of poverty-alleviating policies and programmes has not fully incorporated gender perspectives. This should be done by bilateral, multilateral and State agencies and non-governmental organizations.

46. Dissatisfaction is expressed with the way that national women's machineries tend to be marginalized from the overall process through which public expenditure priorities are determined and funds are allocated, owing to a lack of technical skills and shortage of staff, and to a lack of high-level political status. It is recognized that some countries are taking steps to overcome this. Important lessons could be learnt from their experience.

47. The allocation of financial resources and the design of public expenditure programmes is crucial to increasing the command of women in poverty over resources.

B. Recommendations

48. Official policy should facilitate and strengthen initiatives in the public and private sectors to increase the access of poor women to international as well as national and regional markets by strengthening their endowments of land, skills, credit, information, technology and training and through efficient marketing arrangements.

49. Markets should be regulated in such a way as to extend the entitlements of women in poverty. This means avoiding regulations that restrict women's entry into markets, and enacting regulations that safeguard the ability of women in poverty to benefit from markets, both with respect to employers and with respect to competition from large enterprises. In the case of the labour market, this includes, inter alia, the enactment and enforcement of minimum wage legislation, occupational safety measures and social security.

50. Such regulation should pay attention to both the quality and the quantity of market opportunities. It is sometimes considered that regulation to improve the benefits of market participation for women in poverty will necessarily reduce the number of market opportunities available (especially in the labour market). It is, however, concluded that the major determinant of the extent of market opportunities is the overall state of demand at the national and international levels. Austerity programmes, debt burden and international recession put more important limitations on market opportunities for women in poverty.

51. Women in poverty should be free to organize themselves in all markets to improve their bargaining position, and to press for the full enforcement of all legislation designed to safeguard their rights.

52. States should be responsible for securing at least the subsistence requirements of all citizens and should be encouraged to take any necessary steps to ensure that market forces do not erode poor women's entitlements to land and other environmental resources. The State is expected to reinstate lost entitlements, guarantee the security of existing entitlements and work to extend those in the future.

53. To discharge this responsibility effectively it is necessary for State agencies to incorporate a gender perspective in all their programmes and policies, so that both women and men in poverty are direct beneficiaries, as of right. This requires recognition of poor women's productive, reproductive and community role, and the provision of social support systems such as health, family planning, education and caring facilities.

54. State activities should be undertaken at appropriate levels of centralization and decentralization. Centralization is required in order to define common economic and social rights for all citizens. Decentralization is needed to develop an awareness of the different ways in which these rights can best be used for different groups in different localities and to facilitate State accountability. It should include budgetary transfers to the local level.

55. Both developed and developing countries have had experience in decentralizing the provision of public services, such as health and education. This leads to the conclusion that decentralization of the design, provision and monitoring of such services brings sufficient gains in effectiveness of provision, as long as local groups participate actively in the design and implementation of public provision and measures are incorporated to strengthen the accountability of public sector employees for local groups. It is recommended that the provision of public services should be decentralized where possible.

56. Since mechanisms of accountability are the key to ensuring that the State meets its obligations to its citizens, there must be processes through which State agencies are stimulated to assume their responsibilities and are sanctioned if they do not. This requires a democratic space or public arena in which political representatives, officials and citizens' groups can interact in informed debate; it also requires transparent and accessible procedures through which poor citizens can exercise control over political representatives and officials.

57. As part of the accountability process, States must improve the information they provide about the conditions of women in poverty, and the impact of government policies upon them. To be effective in calling the State to account, women in poverty need popular education programmes, in particular legal literacy programmes, that will teach them about their rights; and opportunities to organize themselves around common objectives.

58. Because of the increasing importance of non-governmental organizations and community organizations, it is emphasized that these organizations must also be accountable. It is important that community organizations and non-governmental organizations keep their flexibility and their intellectual and

financial autonomy in order to safeguard their ability to deal with programmes to alleviate the situation of women in poverty. Particular importance should be attached to groups seeking to extend the democratic space available to women in poverty through "people's actions".

59. It is stressed that multilateral institutions play a key role in setting policy agendas and providing financial and technical assistance to Governments, community organizations and non-governmental organizations. They, too, must be accountable and facilitate the opening up of democratic spaces for interaction with the public. The following measures should be taken:

(a) As part of the multilateral reforms, a re-examination of concepts is needed to give full recognition to all work that women in poverty do, both inside and outside the home;

(b) The accountability of multilateral institutions on gender issues must be increased through system-wide reporting mechanisms, particularly in terms of resource allocation;

(c) Training in gender analysis for staff is needed at all levels, as is the development of monitoring and evaluation systems that measure job performance in terms of responsiveness to these issues;

(d) Intraregional and interregional experiential exchanges need to be strengthened, especially those involving community-based action;

60. It is recommended that bilateral institutions should:

(a) Rethink their approach to poverty issues in the light of the findings of the meeting;

(b) Redesign their poverty programmes to increase the command that women in poverty have over resources;

(c) Incorporate in their programmes measures to build capabilities for advocacy for women in extreme poverty;

(d) Initiate a review of the significance of the policies of their Government for women in extreme poverty in developing countries, across the whole spectrum of policies, paying particular attention to international trade and investment.

61. It is also recommended that multilateral and bilateral institutions, State agencies and non-governmental organizations should:

(a) Give priority to gender issues within each organization, placing emphasis on women in extreme poverty;

(b) Influence the policy framework of the various organizations to include the needs and perspective of women in poverty;

(c) Build strategic alliances with decision makers in order to change organizational culture, programming practices and implementation;

(d) Increase the numbers of gender-aware women within the organization, as well as in decision-making positions.

62. To improve the effectiveness of national women's machineries, it is agreed that one of the key roles of such machineries is to promote equal rights legislation and its enforcement at the national level. Their advocacy role on behalf of women in poverty requires the development of links and the forging of alliances with a wide variety of women's non-governmental organizations; and with the growing numbers of women who are representatives at the national and local levels.

63. The best way to improve the effectiveness of national machineries is to reconstitute them as enabling and networking bodies. Their responsibilities should include linking and facilitating the actions and activities of groups organizing to improve the situation of women. They should also ensure that policies focus on improving the entitlements of women in poverty. The national machineries should be catalysts, empowering other groups to act, and being in turn empowered by the activities of these groups. The precise form of organization would obviously depend on national conditions, but lessons could be learnt from the experience of different countries.

64. Responding to the experience both from the North and the South of the effectiveness of local teams in managing the alleviation of poverty, national machineries may develop as an aggregation of local bodies, as networks or clearing houses empowering these local bodies.

65. It is recommended that focal points be established in all the key ministries, to be staffed at a senior level, with the task of scrutinizing the design of all public expenditure programmes and monitoring their implementation with respect to their implications for women in poverty. Such focal points should be given the responsibility for increasing the amount of public expenditure that is directed towards women in poverty. The national machineries should undertake the coordination of these focal points, and should have the power to call all State agencies concerned with public expenditure to account for the impact of their policies on women in poverty.

66. The forthcoming series of major United Nations conferences and events such as the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in 1995, the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995 would provide a unique opportunity to define an international development agenda that is more cognizant of women's contributions and more responsive to women's needs. Preparations for these events at the local, national and international levels should provide an optimal opportunity for agenda-setting through alliance-building between women and men, and through new institutional partnerships involving both the public and private sectors.

Note

a/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1992, Supplement No. 4 (E/1992/24), chap. I, sect. C, resolution 36/5.